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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 03191

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SUBJECT: FARC "DECLARES CEASEFIRE" AFTER NON-GOC PEACE
COMMISSION IS FORMED

REF: BOGOTA 3017 AND PREVIOUS

11. (C) SUMMARY: THE FARC LEADERSHIP ON FEBRUARY 28 ORDERED A UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE AMONG ALL ITS FRONTS IN RESPONSE TO THE FORMATION OF A PEACE COMMISSION IT HAD RECOMMENDED. THROUGH AN INTERMEDIARY, THE FARC EXPRESSED HOPES THAT COMMISSION MEMBERS WOULD NOW MEDIATE WITH THE GOC TO HALT THE GOC'S MILITARY ACTIONS AGAINST THE FARC. PRESIDENT BARCO RESPONDED BY SAYING THAT HE HOPES THE CEASEFIRE ANNOUNCEMENT IS NOT SIMPLY A PLOY BY THE FARC TO GET THE ARMED FORCES OFF ITS BACK. A WELL-CONNECTED ARMY OFFICER TOLD US THAT HE DOES NOT/NOT BELIEVE THE GOC WILL NOW IMPOSE A CEASEFIRE ON THE ARMED FORCES. WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE. END SUMMARY.

FARC ANNOUNCES CEASEFIRE; PEACE COMMISSION FORMED

12. (U) FARC SECOND IN COMMAND JACOBO ARENAS ANNOUNCED TO THE PRESS ON FEBRUARY 28 THAT THE TOP LEADERSHIP OF THE FARC HAS ORDERED A UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE AMONG ALL ITS FRONTS. THE CEASEFIRE ORDER HAS ONLY ONE CAVEAT -- THAT FARC GROUPS WILL ACT IN "SELF DEFENSE" IF THREATENED BY ARMY OPERATIONS IN THEIR AREA. THE FARC'S CEASEFIRE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE THROUGH SOCIAL CONSERVATIVE SENATOR ALVARO LEYVA DURAN, ITS FAVORITE POLITICAL INTERLOCUTOR. LEYVA CONVEYED TO THE PRESS THE CONTENTS OF HIS TAPED TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH JACOBO ARENAS.

13. (U) IN A FEBRUARY 23 COMMUNIQUE (SEE REFTEL), THE FARC HAD PROPOSED THE NAMES OF FIVE PROMINENT COLOMBIANS FOR THE CREATION OF A NON-GOC PEACE COMMISSION TO INITIATE PEACE TALKS WITH THE SIMON BOLIVAR GUERRILLA COORDINATOR (SBGC). THE FARC PROMISED THAT IT WOULD ORDER A UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE TO "HELP PREPARE A FAVORABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR NEGOTIATIONS" IF THE COMMISSION WAS FORMED, THE FIVE NOTABLES, LED BY FORMER PRESIDENTS MISAEL PASTRANA AND ALFONSO LOPEZ MICHELSEN, STUDIED THE FARC OFFER ON FEBRUARY 27. FOUR OF THE FARC NOMINEES AGREED TO PARTICIPATE ("EL TIEMPO" DIRECTOR HERNANDO SANTOS BOWED OUT CLAIMING CONFLICT OF INTEREST). IN HIS TELEPHONE MESSAGE TO LEYVA DURAN ON THE 28TH, ARENAS CONFIRMED THAT THE FARC'S CEASEFIRE ORDER WAS IN RESPONSE TO THE FORMATION OF THE PEACE COMMISSION (REFTEL).

FARC: COMMISSION SHOULD GET GOC TO HALT MILITARY ACTIONS

14. (U) LEYVA TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE FARC HAS CHOSEN TO "RISK THE IMPLICATIONS OF A UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE" EVEN THOUGH THE GOC COULD REFUSE TO RECIPROCATATE BY ORDERING A CEASEFIRE OF ITS OWN. LEYVA SAID THAT THE FARC THEREFORE HOPES THAT COMMISSION MEMBERS WILL "INTERPOSE THEIR GOOD OFFICES WITH THE GOC," AND MEDIATE A HALT TO THE GOC'S MILITARY ACTIONS AGAINST THE FARC. PRESIDENT BARCO TOLD THE PRESS ON FEBRUARY 28 THAT HE HOPES THE FARC'S CEASEFIRE ANNOUNCEMENT IS SINCERE, AND NOT SIMPLY A PLOY TO ESCAPE THE MOUNTING PRESSURE BEING EXERTED BY

THE ARMED FORCES IN THE FIELD. BARCO REMINDED THE PRESS THAT THE FARC MADE A PREVIOUS UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE ANNOUNCEMENT LAST DECEMBER BUT NEVER OBSERVED IT.

ARMY SOURCES BELIEVE BARCO WON'T ORDER CEASEFIRE

15. (C) A WELL-CONNECTED, HIGH-RANKING SOURCE IN THE ARMY TOLD DAO OFFICER THAT HE DOES NOT/NOT BELIEVE PRESIDENT BARCO WILL RESPOND TO THE FARC'S CEASEFIRE BY IMPOSING A SIMILAR TRUCE ON THE ARMED FORCES. "THANK GOD," THE SOURCE EXCLAIMED, "THAT AT LEAST THIS TIME, UNLIKE THE BETANCUR ADMINISTRATION, WE WILL NOT BE FORCED INTO A UNILATERAL TRUCE BY THE PRESIDENT." THE SOURCE EXPECTS THAT THE ARMED FORCES WILL CONTINUE CONDUCTING COUNTER INSURGENCY OPERATIONS AGAINST ALL GUERRILLA GROUPS, WHEREVER THEY ARE FOUND.

16. (C) BASED ON PREVIOUS PRIVATE STATEMENTS TO US FROM PEACE COUNSELOR RAFAEL PARDO AND OTHERS WE AGREE THAT THE GOC IS UNLIKELY TO CALL OFF THE RECENTLY MORE AGGRESSIVE MILITARY. IN ADDITION, BARCO HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT THERE WILL BE NO SUBSTITUTE FOR HIS PEACE PLAN. THE GOC HAS PROMISED NOTHING TO THE GUERRILLAS AND IS NOW IN A POSITION TO SIT BACK AND SEE IF THE FARC IS AS GOOD AS ITS WORD. NEVERTHELESS, SHOULD THE FARC REALLY ABIDE BY ITS TRUCE, POLITICAL PRESSURE COULD MOUNT FOR A GOVERNMENT RESPONSE IN KIND. IN ADDITION, THE GOC WILL HAVE TO CONSIDER WHAT IF ANY CHANGES IN MILITARY FIELD TACTICS MIGHT BE REQUIRED BY THE FARC'S UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE.

MCNAMARA